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10/056,106	01/25/2002	Kazuyuki Tsuda	JP20000394US1	9452

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EXAMINER

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3623

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Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

Office Action Summary	Application No. 10/056,106	Applicant(s) TSUDA ET AL.	
	Examiner Kalyan K. Deshpande	Art Unit 3623	

-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) OR THIRTY (30) DAYS, WHICHEVER IS LONGER, FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

- 1) ☒ Responsive to communication(s) filed on 25 January 2002.
- 2a) ☐ This action is **FINAL**. 2b) ☒ This action is non-final.
- 3) ☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

- 4) ☒ Claim(s) 1-20 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) _____ is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.
- 6) ☒ Claim(s) 1-20 is/are rejected.
- 7) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.
- 8) ☐ Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

- 9) ☐ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) ☐ The drawing(s) filed on _____ is/are: a) ☐ accepted or b) ☐ objected to by the Examiner.
Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).
Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).
- 11) ☐ The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) ☒ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) ☒ All b) ☐ Some * c) ☐ None of:
1. ☒ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
2. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
3. ☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Notice of References Cited (PTO-892) | 4) <input type="checkbox"/> Interview Summary (PTO-413)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date. _____ |
| 2) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948) | 5) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Informal Patent Application (PTO-152) |
| 3) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO-1449 or PTO/SB/08)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date <u>3/11/02 & 5/10/04</u> . | 6) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

DETAILED ACTION

Introduction

1. The following is a non-final office action in response to the communications received on January 25, 2002. Claims 1-20 are now pending in this application.

Information Disclosure Statement

2. The examiner has reviewed the patents and articles supplied in the Information Disclosure Statements (IDS) provided on March 11, 2002 and May 10, 2004.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 102

3. The following is a quotation of the appropriate paragraphs of 35 U.S.C. 102 that form the basis for the rejections under this section made in this Office action:

A person shall be entitled to a patent unless –

(e) the invention was described in (1) an application for patent, published under section 122(b), by another filed in the United States before the invention by the applicant for patent or (2) a patent granted on an application for patent by another filed in the United States before the invention by the applicant for patent, except that an international application filed under the treaty defined in section 351(a) shall have the effects for purposes of this subsection of an application filed in the United States only if the international application designated the United States and was published under Article 21(2) of such treaty in the English language.

4. Claims 7-10 and 12-15 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(e) as being anticipated by DeFrancesco, Jr. et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6505176).

As per claim 7, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

A workflow server for managing a workflow connected to a plurality of computer terminals, comprising:

a workflow definition management subsystem for managing workflow definitions, said workflow definitions being designed to include skippable nodes and recovery nodes where timing is established to make the skipped nodes perform reprocessing

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(see column 4 lines 61-65, column 5 lines 18-32, column 7 lines 61-67, column 8 lines 1-8, column 9 lines 34-67, and column 10 lines 1-67; where computer terminals design the workflow process. The workflow design can set steps to have specific tests run on each process step. The step can be designated as waived or skipped. A process that does not have a status of "complete" is re-performed until a time it is designated as complete.);

a process management subsystem for managing processes created by using said workflow definitions (see column 3 lines 21-67; where workflow definitions are created using process lists. The workflow system manages all process definitions created for use in the workflow system.);

a client request management subsystem for accepting a request from a person operating said computer terminal (see column 3 lines 21-67 and column 4 lines 61-65; where client requests are controlled by client workstations.); and

a user management subsystem for controlling assignment of a person based on stored information about said person (see column 3 lines 61-67, column 6 lines 8-24, and column 7 lines 29-38; where workflow steps are assigned to individuals and work groups. Work groups and the individuals in the workgroup are defined in the workflow definitions.).

As per claim 8, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

The workflow server of claim 7, wherein said process management subsystem automatically or manually ends an activity that is determined to be skipped, the activity serving as a transaction for each person forming said process, and then

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starts a next activity (see column 9 lines 34-67 and column 10 lines 1-67; where the test of completion can be performed on workflow steps. If a workflow transaction is complete, the next step in the workflow becomes active and available for performance.).

As per claim 9, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

The workflow server of claim 8, wherein said process management subsystem stores information about the skipped activity as a skip list and assigns the skipped activity to an appropriate person by referring to the skip list when proceeding to processing of said recovery node while performing activities in sequence (see column 9 lines 34-67 and column 10 lines 1-67; where the workflow queue serves as an activity list of processes that need to be completed. Skipped activities are stored in workflow definitions and processes to skip if predetermined conditions are met. Until steps are "noticeable" processes are repeated until the step is "noticeable". A specific user or work group is assigned to complete the activity.).

As per claim 10, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

An information processing apparatus for defining a workflow to be executed by a plurality of computer terminals connected to a network, comprising:

a plurality of nodes corresponding to business processes assigned to persons in charge of execution of the workflow (see column 3 lines 61-67, column 6 lines 8-24, and column 7 lines 29-38; where workflow steps are assigned to individuals and work groups. Work groups and the individuals in the workgroup are defined in the workflow definitions.);

means for establishing a flow using paths to connect the plurality of nodes (see column 4 lines 61-65, column 5 lines 18-32, column 7 lines 61-67, column 8 lines 1-8, column 9 lines 34-67, column 10 lines 1-67, and figure 4; where the workflow configurator tool is used to design the workflow. The workflow configurator allows for the creation of workflow steps using workflow rule elements and workflow tests. The workflow steps are the same as activities and nodes. The workflow tests designate re-execution points and can serve as a recovery node.);

means for establishing at least one skippable node among said plurality of nodes (see column 9 lines 34-67 and column 10 lines 1-67; where the system allows a designer to implement tests for each workflow step. One of the tests is to determine whether a workflow step should be skipped.); and

means for establishing at least one recovery node in said flow to define points on the workflow where transactions are to be re-executed for said least one skippable node (see column 4 lines 61-65, column 5 lines 18-32, column 7 lines 61-67, column 8 lines 1-8, column 9 lines 34-67, column 10 lines 1-67, and figure 4; where the workflow configurator tool is used to design the workflow. The workflow configurator allows for the creation of workflow steps using workflow rule elements and workflow tests. The workflow steps are the same as activities and nodes. The workflow tests designate re-execution points and can serve as a recovery node.).

As per claim 12, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

The information processing apparatus of claim 10, further comprising means for defining conditions for causing an automatic skip operation for said at least one

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skippable node established by said means for establishing said at least one skippable node (see column 9 lines 34-67 and column 10 lines 1-67; where a workflow step is skipped based on when predefined conditions are satisfied. A predefined condition is a property that a workflow designer can define, such as assigning the skip test to a workflow step.).

As per claim 13, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

A method for defining a workflow executed at a plurality of computer terminals connected to a network, the method comprising the steps of:

establishing nodes serving as business processes that are assigned to persons in charge of execution of the workflow (see column 3 lines 61-67, column 6 lines 8-24, and column 7 lines 29-38; where workflow steps are assigned to individuals and work groups. Work groups and the individuals in the workgroup are defined in the workflow definitions.);

determining whether said established nodes are skippable (see column 9 lines 34-67 and column 10 lines 1-67; where the system allows a designer to implement tests for each workflow step. One of the tests is to determine whether a workflow step should be skipped.); and

establishing at least one recovery node where the persons in charge of any of said established nodes determined to be skippable can re-execute the business processes, if skipped (see column 4 lines 61-65, column 5 lines 18-32, column 7 lines 61-67, column 8 lines 1-8, column 9 lines 34-67, column 10 lines 1-67, and figure 4; where the workflow configurator tool is used to design the workflow. The

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workflow configurator allows for the creation of workflow steps using workflow rule elements and workflow tests. The workflow steps are the same as activities and nodes. The workflow tests designate re-execution points and can serve as a recovery node.).

As per claim 14, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

The method of claim 13, further comprising the steps of: forming a workflow using said established nodes and paths to determine a sequence of the business processes; and establishing said at least one recovery node at predetermined points on said workflow (see column 4 lines 61-65, column 5 lines 18-32, column 7 lines 61-67, column 8 lines 1-8, column 9 lines 34-67, column 10 lines 1-67, and figure 4; where the workflow configurator tool is used to design the workflow. The workflow configurator allows for the creation of workflow steps using workflow rule elements and workflow tests. The workflow steps are the same as activities and nodes. The workflow tests designate re-execution points and can serve as a recovery node.).

As per claim 15, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

The method of claim 13, further comprising the step of establishing conditions for skipping any of said established nodes determined to be skippable (see column 9 lines 34-67 and column 10 lines 1-67; where a workflow step is skipped based on when predefined conditions are satisfied. A predefined condition is a property that a workflow designer can define, such as assigning the skip test to a workflow step.).

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

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5. The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

6. Claims 1-6, 11, and 16-20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over DeFrancesco, Jr. et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6505176) in view of Gabbita et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6349238).

As per claim 1, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

A workflow system, comprising:

design computer terminals for designing a workflow (see column 4 lines 61-65, column 5 lines 18-32, column 7 lines 61-67, and column 8 lines 1-8; where a network of computers is interacting with the workflow server. Process design is done using a workflow configuration tool.);

operation computer terminals for executing said workflow (see column 4 lines 61-65, column 5 lines 18-32, column 7 lines 61-67, and column 8 lines 1-8; where workflow users are prompted for functions and actions through the use of a network of computers.); and

a workflow server for managing said workflow connected to said design computer terminals and operation computer terminals via a network, wherein said design computer terminals design the workflow by defining in advance skippable activities and re-execution points to perform reassignment to the skipped activities, and wherein said workflow server performs skip processing and reassignment

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processing for said operation computer terminals based on said workflow designed by said design computer terminals (see column 4 lines 61-65, column 5 lines 18-32, column 7 lines 61-67, column 8 lines 1-8, column 9 lines 34-67, and column 10 lines 1-67; where computer terminals design the workflow process. The workflow design can set steps to have specific tests run on each process step. The step can be designated as waived or skipped. A process that does not have a status of "complete" is re-performed until a time it is designated as complete.).

Though DeFrancesco et al. teach re-performing skipped activities, DeFrancesco fail to explicitly teach performing reassignment of the activities. Gabbita et al. teach reassignment of workflow processes (see column 3 lines 7-14 and column 29 lines 20-67; where workflow processes, such as service orders, can be reassigned using remote workstations). The advantages of reassigning workflow processes is that the workflow step can be performed by an available resource thereby removing the bottleneck of the workflow system and increasing efficiency. It would have been obvious, at the time of the invention, for one of ordinary skill in the art to combine the feature of reassigning workflow processes of the Gabbita et al. system to the DeFrancesco et al. system in order to remove bottlenecks from the system and increasing the efficiency of the system, which is a goal of Gabbita et al. (see column 1 lines 38-44).

As per claim 2, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

The workflow system of claim 1, wherein said design computer terminals design the workflow using a plurality of nodes serving as activities that perform transactions, at least one recovery node serving as said re-execution point, and paths connecting

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the nodes and recovery node (see column 4 lines 61-65, column 5 lines 18-32, column 7 lines 61-67, column 8 lines 1-8, column 9 lines 34-67, column 10 lines 1-67, and figure 4; where the workflow configurator tool is used to design the workflow. The workflow configurator allows for the creation of workflow steps using workflow rule elements and workflow tests. The workflow steps are the same as activities and nodes. The workflow tests designate re-execution points and can serve as a recovery node.).

As per claim 3, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

A workflow system, comprising:

computer terminals for executing a workflow (see column 4 lines 61-65; where a plurality of workstations are used for executing a workflow); and

a workflow server for managing said workflow connected to said computer terminals via a network (column 5 lines 18-32, column 7 lines 61-67, and column 8 lines 1-8; where a workflow server is connected to a plurality of workstations for executing the workflow), wherein said workflow server comprises:

means for assigning transactions to predetermined operators, who operate said computer terminals, based on a workflow definition defining a process flow (see column 3 lines 61-67, column 6 lines 8-24, and column 7 lines 29-38; where workflow steps are assigned to individuals and work groups.);

means for performing skip processing automatically or manually according to directions from said computer terminals, for one of said operators to whom the transaction is assigned (see column 9 lines 34-67 and column 10 lines 1-67; where

the system allows a designer to implement tests for each workflow step. One of the tests is to determine whether a workflow step should be skipped.).

DeFrancesco et al. fails to teach reassigning activities or transactions. This limitation is addressed by the rejection of claim 1; therefore the same rejection applies here.

As per claim 4, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

The workflow system of claim 3, wherein said computer terminals send out completion of the transaction to the workflow server after performing the transaction assigned by said workflow server, wherein said transaction assigning means of the workflow server assigns a next transactor in response to the completion of said transaction from said computer terminals (see column 9 lines 34-67 and column 10 lines 1-67; where the test of completion can be performed on workflow steps. If a workflow transaction is complete, the next step in the workflow becomes active and available for performance.).

As per claim 5, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

A workflow server for managing a workflow connected to a plurality of computer terminals, comprising:

means for assigning to a predetermined person a transaction performed as a business process transaction (see column 3 lines 61-67, column 6 lines 8-24, and column 7 lines 29-38; where workflow steps are assigned to individuals and work groups. Work groups and the individuals in the workgroup are defined in the workflow definitions.);

means for performing skip processing to skip the transaction assigned to said person (see column 4 lines 61-65, column 5 lines 18-32, column 7 lines 61-67, column 8 lines 1-8, column 9 lines 34-67, and column 10 lines 1-67; where computer terminals design the workflow process. The workflow design can set steps to have specific tests run on each process step. The step can be designated as waived or skipped. A process that does not have a status of "complete" is re-performed until a time it is designated as complete.).

Though DeFrancesco et al. teach re-performing skipped activities, DeFrancesco fail to explicitly teach performing reassignment of the activities. This limitation is addressed by the rejection of claim 1; therefore the same rejection applies here.

As per claim 6, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

The workflow server of claim 5, wherein said skip processing is performed when a skip request is received from a predetermined computer terminal connected to a network or when predefined conditions are satisfied (see column 9 lines 34-67 and column 10 lines 1-67; where a workflow step is skipped based on when predefined conditions are satisfied. A predefined condition is a property that a workflow designer can define, such as assigning the skip test to a workflow step.).

As per claim 11, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

The information processing apparatus of claim 10, wherein said means for establishing a flow displays said plurality of nodes, while said means for establishing at least one recovery node displays said at least one recovery node with at least one predetermined recovery icon and connects said at least one recovery node with

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predetermined nodes using said paths (see column 4 lines 61-65, column 5 lines 18-32, column 7 lines 61-67, column 8 lines 1-8, column 9 lines 34-67, column 10 lines 1-67, and figure 4; where the workflow configurator tool is used to design the workflow. The workflow configurator allows for the creation of workflow steps using workflow rule elements and workflow tests. The workflow steps are the same as activities and nodes. The workflow tests designate re-execution points and can serve as a recovery node.).

DeFrancesco et al. fail to teach the use of icons and arrows to represent business processes. It is old and well-known in the art to use icons and arrows to designate workflow processes and steps in workflow systems. The advantage of using icons and arrows is that the use of graphical objects facilitates the designer's ability to create workflow definitions. It would have been obvious, at the time of the invention, for one of ordinary skill in the art to use icons and arrows in the DeFrancesco system in order to facilitate the designer's ability to create workflow definitions for the workflow processes, which is a goal of DeFrancesco (see column 3 lines 1-19).

As per claim 16, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

A method for executing a workflow executed at a plurality of computer terminals connected to a network, the method comprising the steps of:

assigning activities that are performed as transactions of business processes in the workflow to predetermined persons who operate the computer terminals (see column 3 lines 61-67, column 6 lines 8-24, and column 7 lines 29-38; where

workflow steps are assigned to individuals and work groups. Work groups and the individuals in the workgroup are defined in the workflow definitions.);

performing skip processing to skip at least one activity assigned to said persons (see column 9 lines 34-67 and column 10 lines 1-67; where the system allows a designer to implement tests for each workflow step. One of the tests is to determine whether a workflow step should be skipped.); and

DeFrancesco et al. fail to teach assigning re-execution of activities to persons. This limitation is addressed by the rejection of claim 1; therefore the same rejection applies here.

As per claim 17, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

The method of claim 16, wherein a list of said activities assigned to each person is stored as a wordlist, and wherein a transaction is performed by retrieving a transaction request from said work list (see figure 7; where activities are stored sequentially in a process list to be performed. A process list is the same as a worklist.).

As per claim 18, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

The method of claim 16, wherein information about any of said persons whose assigned activities have been skipped is stored as a skip list (see column 9 lines 34-67 and column 10 lines 1-67; where the workflow queue serves as an activity list of processes that need to be completed. Skipped activities are stored in workflow definitions and processes to skip if predetermined conditions are met. Until steps

are “noticeable” processes are repeated until the step is “noticeable”. A specific user or work group is assigned to complete the activity.)

DeFrancesco et al. fail to teach assigning re-execution of activities to persons. This limitation is addressed by the rejection of claim 1; therefore the same rejection applies here.

As per claim 19, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

A computer-readable storage medium for storing a program code executable by a computer, the program code comprising the steps of:

establishing nodes serving as business processes that are assigned to persons in charge of execution of a workflow (see column 3 lines 61-67, column 6 lines 8-24, and column 7 lines 29-38; where workflow steps are assigned to individuals and work groups. Work groups and the individuals in the workgroup are defined in the workflow definitions.);

determining whether said nodes established are skippable (see column 9 lines 34-67 and column 10 lines 1-67; where the system allows a designer to implement tests for each workflow step. One of the tests is to determine whether a workflow step should be skipped.); and

establishing at least one recovery node where the persons in charge of the nodes determined to be skippable can re-execute the business processes, if skipped (see column 4 lines 61-65, column 5 lines 18-32, column 7 lines 61-67, column 8 lines 1-8, column 9 lines 34-67, column 10 lines 1-67, and figure 4; where the workflow configurator tool is used to design the workflow. The workflow configurator

allows for the creation of workflow steps using workflow rule elements and workflow tests. The workflow steps are the same as activities and nodes. The workflow tests designate re-execution points and can serve as a recovery node.).

DeFrancesco et al. fail to teach assigning re-execution of activities to persons. This limitation is addressed by the rejection of claim 1; therefore the same rejection applies here.

As per claim 20, DeFrancesco et al. teach:

A computer-readable storage medium for storing a program code executable by a computer, the program code comprising the steps of:

assigning activities that are performed as a transaction of business processes in a workflow to predetermined persons in charge (see column 3 lines 61-67, column 6 lines 8-24, and column 7 lines 29-38; where workflow steps are assigned to individuals and work groups. Work groups and the individuals in the workgroup are defined in the workflow definitions.);

performing skip processing to skip one or more activities assigned to said persons (see column 9 lines 34-67 and column 10 lines 1-67; where the system allows a designer to implement tests for each workflow step. One of the tests is to determine whether a workflow step should be skipped.).

DeFrancesco et al. fail to teach assigning re-execution of activities to persons. This limitation is addressed by the rejection of claim 1; therefore the same rejection applies here.

Conclusion

7. The prior art made of record and not relied upon is considered pertinent to applicant's disclosure. The following are pertinent to the current invention, though not relied upon:

Du et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6041306) teaches a system and method for performing flexible workflow process execution in a distributed workflow management system is described.

Emberton et al (U.S. Patent No. 6349320) teaches a computer system executable method is provided for use in providing work items to a computer station from a database of work items.

Tracey et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6798413) teaches a workflow management system and method.

Guheen et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6957186) teaches a system, method and article of manufacture are provided for identifying various components of a system for building, management, and support purposes.

Kumar et al. (Kumar, Akhil; Zhao, J. Leon; "Dynamic Routing and Operational Controls in Workflow Management Systems", *Management Science*, February, 1999, pp. 253-272) teach dynamic routing and operational controls in workflow systems by providing more flexibility in process modeling, permitting rework on an ad hoc basis, and handling exceptions.

Von Uthmann et al. (Von Uthmann, Christoph; Speck, Mario; "Internet Technology to Run Workflows", *Internet Research*, 1998, p. 414) teaches the use of the internet to support traditional workflow operations.


Kammer et al. (Kammer, Peter J.; Blocher, Gregory Alan; Taylor, Richard N.; Hitomi, Arthur S.; Bergman, Mark; "Techniques for Supporting Dynamic and Adaptive Workflow) teaches exception handling method with the ability to dynamically adapt to the exceptions.

Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Kalyan K. Deshpande whose telephone number is (571) 272-5880. The examiner can normally be reached on M-F 8am-5pm.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Tariq Hafiz can be reached on (571) 272-6729. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free).


kkd


TARIQ R. HAFIZ
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